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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4531
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7409
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3364
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9514
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

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SUBJECT: DRAFT THAI SECURITY LAW FOUNDERING?

REF: A. BANGKOK 03502 (SUMMARY OF DRAFT SECURITY LAW)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 03402 (DOUBLE SECRET LEGISLATION)

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 01754 (BETTER LIVING THROUGH ISOC)

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton. Reason 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Passage of the draft security law expanding the power of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) is looking less and less certain. Criticism of the draft bill has grown in recent weeks, with human rights activists, editorialists and commentators taking aim at the legislation as an Army-backed power play. Government officials have tried in vain to portray the new law as both necessary and benevolent, but their arguments appear to have little resonance thus far.

[1](#)2. (C) Prime Minister Surayud, in public comments on July 13, appeared to open the door to delay the bill further (Note: the draft has not yet been submitted to the legislature. End Note), saying that his government was open to suggestions on improving the law and promising that "the government will not proceed...if highly controversial issues are not settled first." The PM invited critics to attend a public hearing on the draft bill at the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) on July 16.

[1](#)3. (C) The public forum, however, did not appear to advance the government's cause. Human rights activists were even joined by noted security scholar (and Embassy contact) Panitan Watanayakorn--known for his close ties to the military--in critiquing the proposed security structure. In comments to reporters at the forum, NLA Speaker Meechai Ruchuphan emphasized the need for careful scrutiny of the draft law before its passage: a formulation that some of our contacts believe signals the NLA's preference to tie up the bill in debate and prevent its passage. The chief government proponent at the forum, Army Chief of Staff Montri Sangkhasap, even suggested that the bill may have to wait until an elected government takes office.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT. The NLA's calendar is getting short and the security act may yet join other, overly ambitious and poorly explained bills in the "permanent slumber" category. RTG officials have yet to make a compelling argument for the new law: political tensions are low and the Emergency Decree providing expanded authorities in South has been extended for another three months. The government's advocacy of the bill has mostly backfired so far, raising the specter of a military power grab at a time when the coup leadership is

already losing popularity. The (so far) effective fight against the draft shows that Thai civil society is still alive and kicking.

BOYCE